

Junkyard Dog



Halvard Johnson

Halvard Johnson

Junkyard Dog

gradient books

Halvard Johnson

Junkyard Dog

© 2015 Halvard Johnson
All Rights Reserved

Thanks for editors of *Sol: English Writing in Mexico, and Hinchas de Poesia* for previously publishing a few of the poems.

cover by Jukka-Pekka Kervinen

gradient books

2015

Finland

Table of Contents

13 Sentences by John Cage	9
Annihilation Waltz	10
Telephone	11
Upshot	12
Requiem for the New Year	13
Junkyard Dog	14
Between You and Me	15
Nagoya Playboys	16
Status Report	17
On Kafka	18
Antique Epigraphs	19
Silentium	20
Evening with the Széklers	21
On Names	22
End Days	23
Paragon	24
Memo	25
Banalités	26
By the Waters of Babylon	27
On Not Getting to Second Base	28
Athos	29
On Getting Home Early for a Change	30
Update	31
Fragment	32
Array	33
Night Letter	34
Gloria	35
Colloquial Turkish, Chapter 1	36
Through a Surf, Unyielding	37
Shelf Life	38
Alert	39
Two's Day	40
Firth of Forth	41

End of Story	42
Our Parents, Our Siblings, Our Spouses, Our Children,	
Our Cars	43
Plotlines	44
History of the Normans	45
Rant	46
Phrasebook for Airports	47
Sonnet in Elliptical Orbits	48
Darfk	49
Barcarole	50
Dark Matter	51
Sonnet: Terminate and Stay	52
Road to Kara-Koo	53
Voyage	54
A Warning Shot	55
Old Man in Sky	56
Andalusia	57
Blurb for the New Year	58
Late Returns	59
Negative Happy Chainsaw Event	60
Eastern European Dancehall, Ambience #2b, 1934	61
Mixed Bag Sonnet	62
Volcano	63
Citizens Heresy Hunt	64
Baltimore Sonnet	65
<i>Sur les Quais de Paris</i>	66
Whole Cloth	67
Snowdown	68
Maybe	69
Avarice	70
Requiem for the New Year	71
Rehabbing Propaganda House	72
Howls of Execration	73
Global Outlook	74
Words and Music	75
Incursion	76
Quiet Conversations	77

Last of the Mojitos	78
Gloria	79
On John Cage	80
Electric Love	81
Sonnet for the New Year	82
<i>L'Homme et son desir</i>	83

Junkyard Dog

13 Sentences by John Cage

John Cage's "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work" includes, in no particular order, the following sentences:

1. *A canvas is never empty.*
2. The icicles all go down.
3. Would we have preferred a pig with an apple in its mouth?
4. He is like that butcher whose knife never became dull simply because he cut with it in such a way that it never encountered an obstacle.
5. Shortly the stranger leaves, leaving the door open.
6. Setting out one day for a birthday party, I noticed the streets were full of presents.
7. Does his head have a bed in it?
8. He is not saying; he is painting.
9. I know he put the paint on the tires.
10. Ideas are not necessary.
11. As the lady said, "Well, if it isn't art, then I like it."
12. What do images do?
13. *I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I am doing.*

Annihilation Waltz

Fleeting exstasis, abundant decay. Power plays introduce themselves freely. Reality slips on the ice of our fragility. Cooks, gardeners, servants, generals—all dancing the same dance.

Telephone

Time engulfs literature. Even painting has only neutral events to eviscerate, leaving empty promises hanging on ecstatically.

The entertainment left everyone puzzled.
How ought newcomers exist? Telephones
everywhere. Lasting endeavors perhaps

having only negligible effects.

Upshot

Bowing out of the race, stocking up on cigarettes and novels, rediscovering a sense of humor that had languished for years on a shelf down in the basement, postponing that visit to Haiti until the hurricane passed, he said, “Preparation is the key to success”—with a straight face, even. Making landfall somewhere near Galveston revived all those stories about the flood, the ship with eight sails that ran aground there. When *Curiosity* lifted its robotic arm for the first time, in what seemed a Nazi salute, we all learned what we were in for—fewer parking slots at every airport we came to, longer lines at checkpoints, groping hands everywhere, extradition to Sweden right around the corner.

Requiem for the New Year

Near-neighbors in *sonido* and *ritmo*, liturgy and lethargy prepare the poor for their triumph in whatever universe next comes down the pike. Whenever the rich take all they have, they urge them to offer more. Blessed are the poor for they shall remain poor and even poorer forever, amen.

Junkyard Dog

Years of brothelized yearning, costing more than I now spend on cars. Riverfront parcels free from Mau Mau incursions. Satanic portraits hung in a gallery of their own choosing.

Scarlet windows opening onto vast fields of grain, open to all who dare to set foot on them. Money people in unexpurgated editions thought to be models of efficiency. What might have killed us

only made us stronger, some felt. Busloads of tourists (none of them gringos) clogging the town, until Sunday comes along and all go home. Dreams that sink their teeth into your throat.

Between You and Me

My good friend Captain Phillips had recently returned from another voyage, another ship taken over by Somali pirates, another rescue by Navy Seals—call it Captain Phillips II, if you like. Or maybe III. All I remember is that the rain had,

in those days, just begun to taste salty. Checks were bouncing with more regularity than ever, no matter what sort of balance we maintained. Electricity, it turned out, no longer grew on trees. Schumann’s Overture, Scherzo and Finale had finally overtaken

his *Kinderszenen* in popularity, much to the surprise of us all. George Clooney’s recording of Schubert’s *Die Winterreise* was at the top of the charts, with Sandra Bullock at the keyboard. ETs of all stripes were pissed that EMI had not allowed Voyager

to carry the Beatles’ “Here Comes the Sun” into deep space. Steps will be taken, they vowed, in tones as full of menace as could be.

Nagoya Playboys

Dissatisfied with their search results, they drop their language tools and move on to search tips. Exclusive archives of hot nude centerfolds, women the world has never seen.

See your message here, among similar self-published pages, music for purchase, Jim Morrison discographies, and much, much more, Nagoya Marimbas also heard in the offing. Japan

and Australia, together again as never before. Alsatian Cousins opening tonight at Megacity Surplus Bar. More results, only a click away. You're always welcome, but, please,

no married men. Rediscover convention, characters that cannot be decently displayed in any language whatsoever. Even I do not know my own secrets. Some young ladies want to settle

down with dull, older men who collect Damien Hirsts, David Hockneys. Look, jovencitas, all ya gotta do is read them their Kipling until they drift off to sleep. Piece of cake, lemme tell ya.

Status Report

The sun today is so quiet
I can hear myself
almost think.

On Kafka

Those of us seeking the truth find we must always dissemble. We navigate our way to the right office or to the headquarters itself by way of many detours, many encounters with strangers who seem to want to help us but may in fact not want to. Maps are out of date and of not much use because the roads and alleys we access are always being torn up and reconstructed. We even find great gaps in the walls that had been intended to protect us from invaders from the north, from the south, from in fact any direction at all. And doors that once stood open to us are closed, their guardians no longer allowing us to enter. Outside, it is foggy and dark, and it seems like years since we have even seen the light of the sun, heard the splashing of water in what were once the most glorious fountains to be seen and heard anywhere in the known world. Priests and judges and doctors we once trusted with our souls, our liberties and our lives now stood arrayed against us, full of anger at . . . well, who knows what? The walls constructed to keep us safe seem now intended to keep us in. The tools of our trades, now turned against us, bury themselves in our flesh, our guts, our bones, writing the truth of their truth in the dark, secret places where only others can read. The clattering apparatus drowns our thoughts in a racket of its own; the tunnels by which we had hoped to escape served only to admit our tormenters. Confined in cells that barely allow us to stand, we call out to any who might be near. Our names reduced to single letters, and yet we eagerly share them.

Antique Epigraphs

Always, ghosts emphasize mortality. Dogs in the night—
everyone hears them, yet nobody minds, so long as
they vary the rhythm. Ramshackle—a word we don’t
use nearly enough anymore. Do you know what I mean?

Silentium

Sven isn't leaving. Entelechy's nudging turns into urgent messaging. So, if lethargy envelops nowadays' triumphal idealism,

universal misanthropy seems increasingly likely, even necessary, to induce unbridled marginalism.

Evening with the Széklers

Capita dictionum. Hungarian ruins. After-dinner chats,
cognac omitted unless ambiguity raised its ugly head
somewhere along the Tisza's flowery banks.

Istvan Székler and sons (wife and daughters too),
among those present until the 20th century undid
them. Logistical support provided by kitchen staff.

Cigars? Well, no. No money for smokes. Each carrying
its own weight. Reductions in force stored in depots.
Memory loss total and rapid, permanent erasures

Last days of empire, and then rest. Newspapers
and coffee in nearby cafés. And then home.

On Names

A name is a name is a name. Okay, that's over, now let's move along. Woke from a dream this morning to realize that I could think of only two Fletchers: one, of course, was Fletcher Christian, a real person who was eaten alive by Marlon Brando after being half digested by Errol Flynn and Clark Gable. Then I thought of Fletcher Knebel, also a real person. And then I thought of *Fletch*, a movie I've never seen, starring Chevy Chase, who, of course, named himself after Chevy Chase, Maryland, near which I once lived. His real name was (or is) Cornelius Crane Chase, so you can follow his line of reasoning. People named after places are fairly unusual, Port Moresby in Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* being another. (Talk about inside jokes! I'll bet that Bowles had himself a lot of chuckles over that one). I won't even get into places named after people, or other places. Ten minutes with a map would teach you all you need to know about that. As to my own name, Halvard, well, it's unusual enough this side of Norway. But there are a few of us around, including the patron saint of Oslo. (He's not really around much anymore, but I've found an image of him on an Oslo manhole cover.) I owe my name to my mother's mother, who found Halvard so much more . . . well, Scandihavian than the name my parents were going to give me (Brooks, after the hymn writer Phillips Brooks, who wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem," which is to say that Brooks wrote the words, the poem. The tune, simply called "St. Louis," was composed by an organist named Lewis Redner. In the UK, of course, they sing this carol to another tune, one called "Forest Green."

End Days

The end of the beginning of the apocalypse,
officially over. Doomsday groups everywhere
rejoice. Dead rising from graves—armed
guards, mostly women, at cemetery gates.
Renovated Cold War bunkers rented out
for end-of-days parties and galas. Keepers
of the flame light torches for angry villagers.
Dividing loaves and fishes made illegal on
all seven continents. Latest at eleven.

Paragon

Prancing around Racine, Alfred got only nastier. Perhaps a recent adventure galvanized one's neighbors. Paradigms

abounded, reaching almost god-like omniscience. Nonsensical parables amused Racine's almost genially

obsequious nobodies.

Memo

th(t)o(s)u(o)gh(l)t

Banalités

Let's keep our heads about all this.
God only knows.

By the Waters of Babylon

The gentle voice of my spoiler, my desolate daughters,
no one else is hearing. My right hand as dry as my left.
Sounds as free as the sound of the waters, weaving
their long chain. Great time to quit smoking, some say.

On Not Getting to Second Base

I met a traveler from the old country who said, “Two men down in the bottom of the ninth and no one left in the bullpen. A broken-bat single and we were alive again, ready to do some damage even though the baseline seats were nearly deserted. On the mound near the rosin bag, a pitcher’s foot, half off the rubber, twists and paws the dirt. Over the shoulder, a wrinkled lip and cold mocking glance toward first. He stamped the rubber, shook the sand from his cleats, and nodded to the catcher after shaking off three signals. A passionate glare from the one who squatted behind the plate, and the wind-up began. Another glance at first. Beyond the pitcher’s mound, beyond second base, beyond centerfield, the batter could see the statue and the words that appear at the base of the statue, below the pointing hand that mocked us: ‘My name is George Herman Ruth, Sultan of Swat! Look at my work and despair.’ Nothing left now of our season. Around the decomposing year, only that sinking feeling of one final failure: the crack of the bat in my hands, and the run, the tear around first and the final out, trying to stretch a single into a double. The long, slow walk to the clubhouse.”

Athos

While hunting in pairs can last all night, the waterfall shows no fluctuations. The tribe's first-ever non-smoking organization held monthly, if not weekly, meetings, resulting in enormous public debt. Monks rose to their feet, applauding. The tribe favored some kinds of dirt over others. God's last hotline, long ago shut down. Inflatable modules available to all.

On Getting Home Early for a Change

Walking music to my ears, half-discovered anchovies
speak well of pizza, pal. Bring me tablet of water,
I sequestered. This is likely to be an illusion, as I often
said, hypothetical statements, always the first to go.

Failing to glide, the airplane plummets. Delicious
ending in contentment at the edge of far-flung fields.
Some friends stop by, but just to say hello, and,
having said hello, are on their way.

Update

Five minutes left on the Minute Minder,
and all he could think was “What happens
next, when all five minutes are gone?”

Fragment

Food reserves attract great merriment, explained Nils,
thoughtfully. Frescobaldi Rocks! argued Georg.
Many Eurasians now taunted for resisting
America's genetically modified eats.
Naked truth!

Array

Gutsy decibels kept shouting across the room at us,
modest jurors on our way to a legally binding verdict.
Spiffy duplicators hoofed it on a slatted, carpeted stage,
as folks who'd never seen TV watched through the night.

Night Letter

Annette closed out her formal career by singing her AIDS Madrigals in recital, leaving the two of us feeling like we were beggars or lepers out of the Bible. Carolina mornings, I had noticed,

separate print text from hypertext in more efficient ways than do others, with the risk of maximum return—fire in the air, fire in one's shirtsleeves. Through the threatening dusk, we intercut short

pieces with scraps of monologue, as projected images, high on the wall, showed scenes of quiet desperation, porch-sitters passing paper fans back and forth in the gathering dark, the others jogging

off to work like everyone else. Water would be nice, but, drowning in metaphors, he signaled his distress.

Gloria

A bicycle passed with no perceptible
incident. No one laughed, no one cried.
The Mayans began a new 5,125-year cycle
but most of us were left behind, wailing
and gnashing our teeth. As always, the trees
in the park could be seen from my window,
Jesus was born again in central China, this
time as a woman. One good man with a
saxophone takes out twelve bad guys
with guns. Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Colloquial Turkish, Chapter 1

Half-closed, half-open, the lukewarm teacher
wends his way to the embroiderer's shop.
Half-awake, half-asleep, the embroiderer opens
his door. The shop is closed, he says, not
open—closed for the duration. Of the war, he
says nothing, not a word, a phrase, a clause.

Through a Surf, Unyielding

to the cleaned-up root of the assassin
of underfades. Nothing more to say, nothing less.
Flourish me out, being alive in the heart of it all.

Shrapnel and birds' wings reminded of terminal
nurseries, the dead peering down at us through the clouds,
upon himself looking back at them. Easing their way
through that vacuum.

Shelf Life

Ones at the left push
to the right. Ones
to the right struggle
to hang on.

Alert

You were behind her. She had already made up her mind. What she said, we all agreed, was unforgivable. News broke over quarry-cut rocks at the lakeshore.

Two's Day

Sun-shot rain all around.
Shootings spring, up through
tender earth skin.

Firth of Forth

The Firth of Forth is a fjord, my friend. Far from fourth
in fame and fortune far as I can see. Burntisland,
Kirkcaldy and Bo'ness are places there
where newfound friends feistily fondle their fricatives.

End of Story

Say you saw me over there, across
the street, watching you watch me.
What would you do if doing were
an option? If doing were not an op-
tion what would you do then? Say
you said something to someone who
could not hear what you had said.
What would you say then? Say you
said it over again—louder, slower.
Would your saying ever end? Say
your thoughts came home one day
to see you standing by your door,
not knowing when, or if, to go in.
Where would you go then?

Our Parents, Our Siblings, Our Spouses, Our Children, Our Cars

Nothing new around here. Garage too full to add another.
One generation tailgating the one before. Nobody stops
at lights. Fumes overcome you, overcome us, overcome them.
Too dark outside to go out, even in daylight. Malls closed.
The runaway horse, its saddle empty, runs on and on and on.

Plotlines

Muggings and murders, red herrings and bimbos, plots and confusions, heists and bank jobs, betrayals and recriminations, all trailing off into talk.

History of the Normans

Here's to Dudo of Saint-Quentin, about whom we know little, whose *History of the Normans* was based mostly on hearsay and innuendo, who read, it seems, no printed sources, who spent his days pestering friends about Normans they knew or had heard of. Something, I guess, about the red hair.

Rant

Or "mother of all rants" as the poet might have said of Saddam Hussein. The Germans are annoying, to put things mildly. Red lines everywhere.

Don't cross against the light. *Alles in ordnung*. If dictators wanted to be anonymous, they'd have secret names. *Arbeit macht das Leben süß*, as the old

man downstairs used to say as we were shoveling away enough snow to get my car out of the barn. *Und so weiter*.

Phrasebook for Airports

Flight and/or fright
Plane as daylight
Grind transportation
No sentry
Derivals and Appartchers
Customs and denigration
Past ports
Wrecked baggage
Roving walkway
Frequent fryers
Blight attendance
Bleared for take-off
Thirst officer
Control power
First-crass passengers
Runaway
Bag-aged carousals
Overhead apartments
Be something, stay something

Sonnet in Elliptical Orbits

Snoozing under the Brownian tree near the path (not yellow, but brick in an interlocking pattern, something like herringbone), spending an hour and a half or so in a sleepy rural train station, piles of building tiles just outside the door. Counter-intuitive measures all around, grapes purple, almost black. And garlic chutney *vada pav* for all of us, just to see the vampires stayed away. Having wanted to visit Madras before we died,

we hurried back the way we'd come, clambering over rocky outcroppings, stopping only rarely to examine the life in the ponds and cesspools we came upon. Tilting ourselves over, we saw them there, the crawly, creepy things in their green sauce, eying us beadily eying them eying us eying them eying them.

Darfk

No lights in the streets, the windows
of stores, of houses. No sunshine in summer,
in winter, in spring, or in fall. No fires, no
matches. No one here at home now at all.

Barcarole

Beautiful Russian women await you among the drowned mosquitoes beneath the Rialto Bridge. Plunged into love, a South Ossetian tour bus sinks slowly beneath the waves. Strains of the *Concert à quatre* float out above the piazza.

Benediction's benefactor, aka Pinocchio, trails his fingers in the waters of the canal, then fingers his oboe, to the vast amusement of his gondolier. Sleepwalkers, having long longed to take over the city, subject both themselves and

others to random interrogations. More than some marshy lagoon, as they say. Beginning the long decline.

Dark Matter

Missing mass is no laughing matter,
rasped the brown dwarf priest.
Weak interactions
suggest discrepancies

such as black holes that hang out
on the outskirts of town,
where scientists like school-
boys playing hooky

toss theories back
and forth.

Sonnet: Terminate and Stay

for Jukka-Pekka Kervinen

Residential evil and freaky Sundays, chronically engaged with idiosyncracies of . . . well, others.

Tear ducts subjected to spectroscopic analysis as entrails of goats bide their time in the waiting room.

Finnish libidos, rustproof as ever, attend most kindly to the needs of those passing by in the streets.

Underclass members google themselves daily but find nary a hit. Statutes of limitations run out?

Topsoil emissions, middleweight playboys— what more do we need under this administration?

What's this now? Looks like a motorcade: incredibly fatuous handcarts full of Knute Rockne fans.

99 hoagies lying on a wall. One of them sings, "Roll over. Roll over." 98 hoagies lying on a wall . . .

Road to Kara-Koo

Here, whole cities on the move, forty clans' worth,
yurts and all. Silk Road travelers mix with the locals,
share the same campfires, swap legends and tales.
The legend of the faded mid-level archer, told over
and over, his Scythian bow buried with him, like a dog.

Voyage

Neither parallel nor contrary, the ways
wended on. Sitting in that manner was not
allowed. Every one of them knew that.
Sometimes their arrogance took a snooze.

Standing mute, our trees had no suspicion
that something was . . . up.

A Warning Shot

Anyone else would have found it embarrassing, a writing case with neither paper nor writing implements within it. Careful consideration of the esthetic

appeal of such shenanigans comes late, at the end of our shift. The chimney is closed, doesn't draw much anymore.

In addition to the adjoining premises, your last payment arrived several days late. To live as a tenant requires keeping within bounds.

There is a garage behind the house, and she has been through a lot lately. Don't add to her difficulties, hear?

Old Man in Sky

On the chosen day, September 22, at precisely 8:44 GMT, the old man appears just where the sun would normally be. The earth—its surface—unfurls itself from its globe and perks up its ears, waiting . . .

Looking something like a Mercator projection, but without the distortions, the edges lean forward making the whole thing sort of concave like. The old man explains that he, looking just a tad like George Carlin, but with more hair, has finally

found the time to come around and see what wonders he hath wrought here. He says things seem pretty much okay, on a planetary scale. Folks are being born and dying in pretty much the right proportions. All in all, he says, he is pleased with his handiwork.

But, he asks in conclusion, Vas you effer in Zinzinnati?

Andalusia

Another nobody delivers a long, useless sermon
in absentia. Arranged nuptials don't aggravate lovers
unless Sevilla's inherently Andalusian anthropods
nullify direct action. Let us sing it again.

Blurb for the New Year

The first page is splendid, but the rest are promising at best and often blank. As usual there will, most likely, be an overabundance of coincidence and melodrama, but those pages will be crowded with incident and character. Can we expect any sort of resolution this time around? Doubtful. And that's probably all to the good.

Late Returns

Ballots from Alpha Centauri are running late,
as are those from even more far-flung
precincts of the galaxy. After a long, winding,

self-indulgent speech, galactic librarians remind
us that we will not be able to borrow anything
if three-week, one-week, or two-day loan

items have not been returned and all fines paid.
Intra-galactic congestion—when the offered load
of a data communication path exceeds the capacity

(lots of mariachi children strumming gently in
the background)—of boggy, blood-filled tissue. Huge
spin rallies of interstellar truckers hit by late fees

and fines. "Ain't always who votes that counts. Some-
times it's who counts votes that counts," says Mr. Steel.

Negative Happy Chainsaw Event

Step away from the egg, the policeman shouted, and keep
your flaps where I can see them. Ghostly romances and suicides
will stay in your head whether you want them to or not.
Geriatric teenagers out on a spree. Free to be you. Free to be me.

Eastern European Dancehall, Ambience #2b, 1934

Hungarian violinist tripped, fell,
brushing armed Pashtun waiter,
hot lead flying everywhere
but where needed.

Mixed Bag Sonnet

Indelible pictures describing dawn signals.
Enormous persuasions. Non-human vagaries.
Inordinate complexities, with sections on program
executions. Whistlers, moaners. Afterwards

feeling the clearness, the cleanliness of new
modifications, splitting texts in various ways.
In a hospital now, having appendix and solenoids
removed. Minimal tools. Journeying back

through time. Dancing the Hunter S. Thompson
Memorial Mambo tells us a lot about clear
expository prose. Neat stuff on the horizon even
when Mugabe leaves office. Old-fashioned

design and circuitry—damaged, klunky. Pre-
historic SOBs, blood still running in our veins.

Volcano

Ten minutes past the henhouse your horse
keels over, dead. Rhubarb seeds do nothing
to assuage our thirst. Children gathered milkweed
so that shot-down airmen might survive when
plunged into the sea. Infected taste buds do little
to contribute to our enjoyment of the conversation.
Cars proceed slowly up the hill and then turn left,
carefully avoiding any glimpse of the volcano
to the right. Hello, there. We both share an interest
in massage tables, it seems. Devoid of content
and having an aversion to honesty, he wandered,
while dreaming, as advised, of white horses only.

Citizens Heresy Hunt

The wolf had been approved, though in a limited way.
Would he ever stop to preach penance? I wondered.
The 12th and 13th centuries were a high. Two years
of Germany, Spain, and Hungary were quite enough.
The men examined the doctor, his influence account,
and it seemed something crucial had been shouted.

Baltimore Sonnet

“Once upon a time Baltimore was necessary.”

—Gertrude Stein

Another of those cities killed by gentricide, Baltimore
waits for the ships to come back to its harbor. Life on its streets,
homicidal: neighbors who don’t think green belongs in a city,
who cut an age-old grapevine that dares to come through to

their side of a cyclone fence. Neighborhoods the Sun never
shines on. Cutting corners where necessary. Forgetting
the unforgettable. Patterson Park is where we once met,
just west of Highlandtown, just east of Butcher’s Hill.

The pears, the cellars and the coins are there. Business in
Baltimore takes no hostages, no prisoners. Preakness weekend
is no time to visit Baltimore, unless you have family to stay with,
or unless you are a horse. Business in Baltimore makes

counting easy. For ten years I lived in Baltimore. Happy to be
there, and counting. Thank you for very much having me.

(Including fragments from Gertrude Stein’s “Business
in Baltimore”)

Sur les Quais de Paris

Thelma at night sat down among the footpads, thinking of her day's shopping along the boulevards, wondering what she had missed. Smugglers and other immigrants applauded her efforts at self-restraint. Residual aborigines will not camp down at night without a fire or far from a waterhole. Soft undersides of Paris—Deva, Veda, Jihad.

Whole Cloth

Strangers on trains rarely nod to each other. Grackles
on rooftop finials racketing, long tails dipping in breeze.
Established religions vie with unestablished for tax
breaks. Rolling stock awakens sleepers from their long nap.

Stealthy as ever, something comes over us. We know not what.
Trees of life take root among us, grasping at straws. Dark
melodrama our forte, not overworked symbols. Is he
in love with her, or merely seeking a haircut?

Snowdown

The snow came up over the top of his dignitaries,
those stained-glass violations of common sense
and rhythmical breathing. Loyalists opposed
the slash in his side, the embarrassment of print
without footnotes, notes without footprints.

Maybe: A Noncommittal Sonnet of Fourteen Lines or So

Heart-breaking accounts of innocence and/or guilt tear us to pieces. Europa's salty seas have yet to prove their commercial value to those of us still on earth. Conservatives estimate suggest some possibility that spending there lags well behind revenues.

Small lakes on the surface appear and disappear, as does food here among the lazy poor, who never join Christmas Clubs anymore. Sluggish lifeforms, at best. Division of loaves and fishes now made illegal in most states. Lobbyists for vintners are writing now to a bill

that would entirely stop the changing of water into wine. Maybe we will and maybe we won't, but you can bet your bottom dollar that we probably won't. All options open, laid out upon the table, but yet . . . Look away, look away—the campaign has barely begun to gather

steam, and yet . . . And yet we never know. If the election were held today we might rise up, or . . . well, we don't know yet, do we?

Avarice

A very amiable Republican indicted certain equivocators among venerable arborescences. Reshaped, I couldn't even argue. Vindictiveness and rapacious iconography counts every American victory a religion-inspired chromic event.

Requiem for the New Year

Near-neighbors in *sonido* and *ritmo*, liturgy and lethargy prepare the poor for their triumph in whatever universe next comes down the pike. Whenever the rich take all they have, they urge them to offer more. Blesséd are the poor for they shall remain poor and even poorer forever, amen.

Rehabbing Propaganda House

The lift entry was greeted by many with exuberant shouts of envy. Several of the men believed they were too hairy underneath their clothes. With eyes downcast, they entered the changing room, just in time for lunch.

Chapter four began with a new turn of phrase, popular among party girls. A tad too sentimental most would say. The five secret paths at last made visible to one and all. Coagulation, our chosen servant, our blue-lidded daughter.

Howls of Execration

Every lie starts a war. To serve that end villains are needed. First-hand impressions lead us to no sure conclusions. Several sentries guard the gates willingly, ready to take naps for their country.

At the border of reason, land mines and cluster bombs. Women and children last, if ever.
Electronic registration prior to midnight, allows all to vote or not vote, depending. No photos, please.

Global Outlook

Areas of non-religious ferment increasingly rare, despite strenuous efforts to achieve parity. In occupied Poland, all bets are off. Afghanistan is fatally divided into thirty-seven provinces. The player piano does not start.

Words and Music

The two white dogs just took me for a walk, and all we saw or smelled or heard flowed past us, none copyrighted or trademarked, none for sale but for a few houses. All else passed by like a river, repeating itself endlessly in various little curlicues of sense, in lively tarantellas, fugues, fughettas, in canons, rancheras, twelve-bar blues and galliards.

Incursion

Evening feathers across the sky.
One by one, the colonizers come.

Quiet Conversations

Today she is happy. Yesterday she might have been happy. Tomorrow? Who knows. Her journey has been organized by a charity organization.

Their very limited capabilities notwithstanding, they choose her destinations, her ports of call. Barbed wire, tanks, interdictions of various stripes. When we get stopped, she flees.

Her university has been rebuilt in the mountain fastnesses of Kosovo, her commute now a killer.

The Last of the Mojitos

In everlasting light, as such, they often find their way to the bar for one last mojito. The lieutenant, on the back of a Vespa, made one last attempt to keep the barflies and mosquitoes in check. Hard-earned taxpayers' dollars in pursuit of peace and justice.

Gloria

A bicycle passed with no perceptible
incident. No one laughed, no one cried.
The Mayans began a new 5,125-year cycle
but most of us were left behind, wailing
and gnashing our teeth. As always, the trees
in the park could be seen from my window,
Jesus was born again in central China, this
time as a woman. One good man with a
saxophone takes out twelve bad guys
with guns. Gloria in excelsis Deo.

On John Cage

Slid downstairs on the bannister with him once. He, coming down from the eleventh floor where Cunningham's studio was, me from the sixth where Lynda and I lived in those days. His famous face wearing a slightly irregular smile not directed at me, or anyone else the two of us could ever see.

Electric Love

Mainly living, but how? Swiss/German excursions investigate. Checkpoint Charlie now a web café, or is it cafeteria? What does it really look like there?

Unable to speak at certain times of day, we monitor our purse-strings closely. No regrets, and yet we would rather that things had somehow been different. Without

any compensation, we proceed with ethnic rinsing. Letting the dogs off their leashes. Bidding them attack.

Sonnet for the New Year

Pleistocene campfires flickering in the distance,
deeply rooted slogans chat it up with money barons. Medical
malpractice suits us just fine, thank you very much.
For instance, well-delivered apologies salve all wounds.

Partial reconciliations break step when crossing a bridge,
miraculous transformations no longer expected or offered.
Higher disease rates unrelated to education or health costs
speak volumes to our well-tuned ears. Biology urges us

to seek out music in the company of other people. Yahweh
and other loud cell phone talkers gather to break bread to-
gether, airwaves atremble with salutations, with greetings.
On everyone's lips, prospects for reelection, for theatrical

productions that do not close in a month or less. And soon,
all spats aside, someone texts us a toast, and all follow suit.

L'Homme et son desir

Others got heart, I got the boot. Negative culpability eluded me. What I wanted was what every man (and woman) wanted: to evade capture as long as possible, shoes to wear when running on rough terrain, that ability (so often seen on TV) to talk through a frozen smile, to live free of intimidation, of charge, of want. Yes, want.

Also by Halvard Johnson

Transparencies & Projections [New Rivers Press, 1969]
The Dance of the Red Swan [New Rivers Press, 1971]
Eclipse [New Rivers Press, 1974]
Winter Journey [New Rivers Press, 1979]
G(e)nome [xPressed, 2003]
Rapsodie espagnole [xPressed, 2003]
Changing the Subject (with James Cervantes) [Red Hen Press, 2003]
The Sonnet Project [xPressed, 2004]
Theory of Harmony [xPressed, 2004]
The English Lesson [Unicorn Press, 2004]
Guide to the Tokyo Subway [Hamilton Stone Editions, 2006]
Organ Harvest with Entrance of Clones [Hamilton Stone Editions, 2007]
Tango Bouquet [Vida Loca Books, 2007]
The Perfection of Mozart's Third Eye [Chalk Editions, 2007]
Obras Pùblicas [Vida Loca Books, 2010]
Mainly Black [Vida Loca Books, 2010]
Sonnets from the Basque [Vida Loca Books, 2011]
Remains To Be Seen [Spuyten Duyvil Books, 2013]
Songs My Mother Taught Me [Gradient Books, 2014]

